

Forum: Advisory Panel on the Question of the Central African Republic (CAR)

Issue: Release and rehabilitation of child soldiers in and around the CAR

Student Officer: Alexis Mountcastle

Position: Vice President of the Advisory Panel on the Question of the CAR

Introduction

In an age characterized by revolutions, the recruitment of child soldiers into both anti-government rebel groups and government affiliated militias has become all too common. Recent rebel attacks that have taken place in the Central African Republic (CAR) give proof of this; the 2012-2013 armed conflicts between the Seleka coalition and the government of the CAR saw a “sharp increase in the recruitment of child soldiers” in the region. Currently, the Human Rights Watch estimates that the number of child soldiers globally ranges between 250,000 - 300,000 (the covert nature of the practice makes it challenging to acquire accurate statistics); according to UNOCHA, nearly half of all child soldiers are found in Africa.

Children who have taken part in armed conflicts often have great trouble being accepted back into society due to their lack of education and their having been ostracized during the war. It is crucial that UN member states work together on solving the issue of child soldiers throughout the CAR and her neighboring states in order to ensure both a reduction in the number of armed child revolutionists and to usher the rehabilitation and reintegration of these young people into safer communities lest they fall back into lives of violence.

Definition of Key Terms

Child Soldiers

“A child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or

armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes,” as defined by the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (2007).

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation means to “restore condition”, referring to health, social systems, education, and a wide range of other issues.

‘In and around the CAR’

In this context, the phrase ‘in and around the CAR’ generally refers to the Central African Republic and the region of Central Africa. It may be extended to encompass Sudan and South Sudan.

UN Perspective

Naturally, the UN is opposed to all forms of child soldiery, be it government related or not. As taking part in wars robs young people of their family, education and innocence, and often instills in children permanent psychological damage, the UN is working to eliminate all people under the age of 18 from armed militias by the year 2016. The United Nations Children’s Fund, or UNICEF, has been playing an especially active role in the worldwide elimination of children from war groups and in the promotion of the rehabilitation of such postbellum soldiers. Likewise, the Rome Statute of the ICC (of which the UN is a supporter), “criminalizes the conscription, enlistment or use in active hostilities of child soldiers under the age of fifteen years, both in international and non-international armed conflicts,” making the usage of especially young combatants a universally recognized war crime. [Article 8(2)(b)(xxvi), (e)(vii)]

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Séléka Coalition (Seleka Coalition) - The Seleka Coalition military force is an alliance of armed forces known for its role in the 2012-2013 CAR conflicts. Actively against President François Bozizé, this group ultimately overthrew the CAR government in March of 2013 and appointed Michel Djotodia as president. The militia includes the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace, the Patriotic Convention for Saving the Country, the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity, and other anti-government groups.

Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) - The LRA has been named a major threat to the CAR due to its previous attacks on the country and the group's prominent use of child soldiers.

Government of the CAR - Led by President Bozizé until March of 2013, the government of the CAR faced international criticism for having recruited child soldiers who had escaped from the LRA into its military.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
10 December 1959	UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child
26 June 1973	International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention 138
1985	UNICEF condemns usage of child soldiering as a form of exploitative child labor
1994	The UN announces its campaign to end the use of child soldiers
16 June 1999	International Labour Organization (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182

25 May 2000	The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict is adopted by UN General Assembly
20 November 2001	United Nations Security Council resolution 1379, urging states to prosecute those who recruit and use children in war
14 October 2009	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts enumerates The Six Grave Violations Against Children During Armed Conflict
11 June 2010	N'Djamena Declaration
10 December 2012- 24 March 2013	2012-2013 Armed Conflict between the Government of the CAR and Seleka, an anti-President Bozizé coalition force
24 March 2013	The capital of the CAR, Bangui, was seized by the rebel forces, and Bozizé fled the country. President Djotodia takes power

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Propositions by the United Nations to bring about the long awaited elimination of child soldiery in and around the CAR have included numerous peacebuilding resolutions, conferences and multilateral agreements. Of late, the N'Djaména Declaration, signed by representatives of the CAR, Cameroon, Sudan, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad, has promoted the release and reintegration of child soldiers into society. Important resolutions include the Security Council resolutions 1612, 1882, and 1998, which were drafted so as to monitor the use of child soldiers, list the 'six grave violations' and their effective abolishment in member states, and declare schools and

hospitals off limits to armed forces, respectively. The Paris Commitment and Paris Principles of 2007 aim to protect children from “unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups.”

Furthermore, UNICEF has constructed transitory care centers for children escaping war, where they receive general medical check-ups. These children are grouped into “families”, and are appointed counsellors to help them cope with their physical and psychological scars. Here, young children gradually readapt into a war-free society over a course of three months. If possible, they are reunited with their families and are given social and economic support. Once children have left the transitory care centers, UNICEF works to give them an education, job, or vocational training to ensure a full reintegration into society. Since 1998, over 100,000 child soldiers have been released from armed rebel or government affiliated forces with the help of UNICEF, and successfully reintegrated into society.

Possible Solutions

-Work to eliminate hunger and a lack of medical treatment

To keep children from entering the harsh environment of war, it is crucial that the issues of hunger and medical treatment be addressed. Many underaged soldiers see armed conflict forces as a type of refuge, where they will be guaranteed free meals and health treatment, despite the sacrifices they must make to be a part of such gangs. Therefore, rather than being forced into armed conflict groups, many children blindly enlist in military coalitions, being enticed by the prospect of better, more secure lives.

-Educate possible victims before they are recruited

Other reasons for joining include brainwashing and drug dependency - issues which may be solved in advance by raising awareness and educating the population about these problems so that possible victims know what to expect when facing recruiters.

-Station UN troops in afflicted areas who have been trained to recognize signs of child soldiery

-Use public media of which child soldiers may have access to encourage them to escape

Selected Resources:

Childrenandarmedconflict.un.org,

Release and Reintegration <<http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/our-work/release-and-reintegration/>>;

Central African Republic <<http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries/central-african-republic/?contentonly=1>>;

The Six Grave Violations Against Children During Armed Conflict: The Legal Foundation <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/WorkingPaper-1_SixGraveViolationsLegalFoundation.pdf>.

Child-soldiers.org,

Who Are Child Soldiers? <http://www.child-soldiers.org/about_the_issues.php>.

Iccnow.org,

The International Criminal Court and Children's Rights <<http://www.iccnw.org/documents/FS-AMICC-ICCnChildRights.pdf>>.

Icrc.org,

Paris principles and Paris commitments to protect children <<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/paris-principles-commitments-300107.htm>>.

Peacedirect.org,

Child Soldiers <<http://www.peacedirect.org/child-soldiers/?gelid=CK2sqtdlg7kCFWRU4god00kAgQ>>.

Unicef.org,

Children as Soldiers <<http://www.unicef.org/sowc96/2csoldrs.htm>>;

'N'Djaména Declaration' adopted <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/chad_53966.html>.

Un.org,

Child Soldiers <<http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/briefing/soldiers/soldiers.pdf>>.

Warchild.org,

CHILD SOLDIERS <<http://www.warchild.org.uk/issues/child-soldiers>>.

